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SUBJECT: UZBEKISTAN: WEATHER, CLIMATE, AND HYDROLOGY WORKSHOP GIVES HOPE FOR REGIONAL COOPERATION

¶11. (SBU). SUMMARY: On November 10-12 the Government of Uzbekistan (GOU) hosted a Regional Workshop on Improving Weather, Climate, and Hydrological Service Delivery and Reducing Vulnerability to Disasters. The workshop's purpose was to discuss weather, climate, and hydrological service delivery in Central Asia. Representatives of the National Hydro-meteorological Services (NHMS) of the five Central Asian countries signed the Workshop Protocol, a draft Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), and a draft program of regional initiatives aimed at improving hydro-meteorological service delivery as well as increasing capacity to adapt to the changing climate. The World Bank will serve as coordinator for the regional initiatives, implementation of which is to begin no later than December 2009. The proposed initiatives could help ease long-standing tensions over water sharing in the region. END SUMMARY.

STATUS OF NHMS IN CENTRAL ASIA

¶12. (SBU) On November 10-12, Uzbekistan hosted a Regional Workshop on Improving Weather, Climate, and Hydrological Service Delivery and Reducing Vulnerability to Disasters in Central Asia and the Caucasus. The European Commission, the UN office on International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR), the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), and the World Bank (WB) sponsored the event. Over 100 participants attended, including senior NHMS officials from Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan as well as representatives of donor agencies and international financial institutions. (NOTE: Although the workshop ostensibly included issues affecting the Caucasus, in fact only issues related to Central Asia were discussed.)

¶13. (SBU) World Bank Senior Environmental Officer Vladimir Tsirkunov opened the workshop with a general overview of NHMS in Central Asia. He said that over the last 20 years massive underfunding has left the region with deteriorating observation networks, outdated equipment and technology, insufficient scientific and research support, and a lack of trained specialists. As a result, regional NHMSs lack the capacity to respond to basic national needs for data and services, thereby making the region increasingly vulnerable to natural disasters. He said that according to a recent WB study, a 6-30 million USD investment program would make it possible to prevent economic losses amounting to between 5.8 and 23 million USD annually.

COUNTRY PRESENTATIONS

¶4. (SBU) Tajikistan NHMS head Mahmad Safarov said the weather-dependent sectors in Tajikistan's economy account for 61.4 per cent of the country's GDP. He characterized his agency as being in critical condition and said 6 million USD would be needed to modernize the Tajik NHMS.

¶5. (SBU) Talgat Bigozhin, Deputy General Director of Kazakhstan's NHMS, said that Kazakhstan needs 266 million USD to modernize its NHMS. He stressed the importance of data sharing, transboundary cooperation, joint studies on the impact of climate change, and assessment of water resources utilizing an agreed methodology.

¶6. (SBU) Turkmen NHMS head Kakamurad Yazyev said his agency often fails to meet the basic requirements of users for hydro-meteorological data and information. He said an estimated 30 million USD is needed for modernization of the Turkmen NHMS.

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¶7. (SBU) Victor Chub, Director General of Uzbekistan's NHMS, stressed the importance of modernizing the Uzbek NHMS for hydro-meteorological safety forecasting and disaster risk management. He said the main sources of potential natural disasters in Uzbekistan are located outside the country in neighboring Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Therefore, Chub continued, it is important for the Uzbek NHMS to cooperate and closely interact with Kyrgyz and Tajik NHMSs for collection, processing, and dissemination of hydro-meteorological data. He informed that the GOU has already allocated 10 million USD to strengthen the technical capacity of the Uzbek NHMS, but he added that this is not enough to cover all the needs. He said the Uzbek NHMS suffers from brain drain, lack of specialists, and a weak system of personnel training. Chub requested outside training assistance.

DONORS: RISK ASSESSMENT AND SUPPORT FOR NHMS MODERNIZATION

¶8. (SBU) International and donor organization representatives presented risk assessments and outlined their support for NHMS modernization. Head of UNISDR's Asia and Pacific Regional Coordination Office Praveen Pardeshi said earthquakes are the dominant disaster risk in Central Asia, followed by floods, landslides, and drought. Epidemics and transportation and industrial accidents are also significant. During the last twenty years (1988-2007), 177 disasters have caused 36,463 deaths. Of these reported disasters, 19 percent were earthquakes, 25 percent floods, 13 percent landslides, and 3 percent drought. Earthquakes caused the greatest number of deaths: 32,834.

¶9. (SBU) Pardeshi continued that climate change models for Central Asia predict a temperature increase of 4 to 6 degrees Celsius over the next 80 years. One consequence will be decreased water availability and the potential for severe droughts.

¶10. (SBU) Pardeshi said that UNISDR, in partnership with the WB and

WMO, is implementing a Central Asia and Caucasus Disaster Risk Management Initiative (CAC-DRM) that focuses on three areas: (i) coordination of disaster mitigation, preparedness and response; (ii) financing of disaster losses, reconstruction and recovery, and disaster risk transfer instruments such as catastrophe insurance and weather derivatives; and (iii) hydro-meteorological forecasting, data sharing and early warning.

¶11. (SBU) Matthias Anderegg, head of the Regional Disaster Reduction Program of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), reported on his agency's support of improved hydro-meteorological data generation, flow, and flood forecasts. The SDC project provides for rehabilitating and equipping at least 60 observation platforms in the flow formation zones of the Syrdarya and Amudarya rivers, rehabilitating up to ten snow metering routes in the Amudarya river basin, and providing hardware and software tools for hydrological data processing and short and long-term flow forecasting. The current phase of the project also aims to modernize the communication centers at each NHMS to improve data exchange between them and the key water users in Central Asia.

¶12. (SBU) Alexander Kalashnikov from USAID/Uzbekistan outlined the US Government's technical assistance to Central Asian NHMSs. During 2000-2005 USAID supported programs to improve reliability of hydrological data collection and processing. USAID procured and installed High Resolution Picture Terminal (HRPT) computer processing for downloading NOAA satellite imagery in Uzbek and Kazakh NHMSs. To improve meteorological data collection from remote posts, 22 Campbell Scientific Instruments (CSI) were installed: six in Kyrgyzstan, seven in Tajikistan, seven in

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Uzbekistan, and one each in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. USAID also provided a "batch" hydro-meteorological data communication system for 59 locations throughout Uzbekistan. One of USAID's most successful regional activities was the installation of the Meteor Burst Communications System that includes 39 data transmission platforms in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. This network has the capacity to expand further, even to include China and Afghanistan. (NOTE: The various country delegations all acknowledged and expressed their appreciation for USAID support in NHMS improvements and modernization.)

¶13. (SBU) USAID's future plans include support for analysis of the impact that global climate change is having on Central Asia's hydrology. USAID also will support a comprehensive analysis of the economic ramifications of optimized water-energy resource utilization in the Syrdarya and Amudarya River Basins. An important objective of USAID programs is to add substance to the inter-state water/energy dialog among the Central Asian countries.

SIGNIFICANT OUTCOMES

¶14. (SBU) Representatives of the NHMSs of the five Central Asian countries signed the Workshop Protocol, a draft Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), and a draft program of regional initiatives. The MoU and draft program outline the main issues for the Central Asian NHMSs. These include technical and organizational improvements needed to increase data sharing capabilities, timely monitoring of mountain snow-packs and glaciers, creation of national meteorological centers, development of regional approaches to quantitative forecasting for early warning and disaster risk management, capacity development and training of NHMS personnel,

development of national data funds, and improvements needed for better assessments of the impact of climate change.

¶15. (SBU) The MoU also asks that the Executive Committee of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS) be a partner in these efforts, and it calls for revision of the 1999 Agreement between the Central Asian NHMSSs on hydro-meteorological cooperation. The MoU tasked the NHMSSs to start joint implementation of the regional programs no later than December 2009. The WB agreed to serve as coordinator for follow-up consultations and actions. (NOTE: The MoU must still be approved by the individual Central Asian governments.)

COMMENT

¶16. (SBU) The proposed initiatives and regionally coordinated delivery of hydro-meteorological services will help the countries of Central Asia limit losses -- currently millions of dollars annually -- due to natural hazards. They also will improve data and information sharing, climate monitoring, and drought management, thereby improving the countries' capacities to adapt to the changing climate. Most importantly, improved cooperation between Central Asian NHMSSs will contribute to the resolution of long-standing unsettled tensions over water allocation.

BUTCHER